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RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUCNARF/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0741
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0839
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0679
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0774
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RUEHDT/AMEMBASSY DILI 2535

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DILI 000007

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/8/2017
TAGS: PGOV PREL KPKO MARR ASEC UN TT
SUBJECT: MOUNTING CONCERN ABOUT F-FDTL BEHAVIOR

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CLASSIFIED BY: W. Gary Gray, Charge, exec, Dept of State .
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. UNMIT is seriously concerned about arrogant and undisciplined behavior by increasingly visible armed F-FDTL elements in Dili. According to the Deputy SRSG, UNMIT is submitting a formal complaint to Prime Minister Jose Ramos-Horta and plans to raise the issue with the UN Security Council. The UN's worries are certainly understandable given F-FDTL's recent history and the almost total lack of any accountability for past incidents, but the GOET is likely to continue its deferential approach to the defense forces. End summary.

¶2. (C) The recent holiday period saw a number of disturbing incidents around Dili involving F-FDTL personnel. UNPOL reported on January 1 that disorder erupted in the Bidau area of Dili as a result of a confrontation between personnel in two F-FDTL vehicles and pedestrians. On the previous evening an Australian citizen was seriously injured when his motorbike was struck on the beach road by a reportedly recklessly driven F-FDTL truck which left the scene without stopping. There were also reports during this period of F-FDTL personnel throwing rocks from the back of their trucks at UNPOL officers and other accounts of problems around town involving intoxicated F-FDTL soldiers.

¶3. (C) In a January 6 conversation with Charge, DSRSG Eric Tan said UNMIT had compiled a list of these and other recent incidents involving F-FDTL to be presented to PM Ramos-Horta. Tan said that UNMIT would even go to the extent of proposing that the issue be raised with the UNSC. Tan, a retired Singaporean general who was the PKF commander here in 2002-2003, also expressed his unhappiness with the increasing visibility of armed F-FDTL around Dili and their heavy presence at recent GOET-sponsored events. He added with disgust that the F-FDTL was in effect acting like "just a gang in uniform."

¶4. (C) While the UN's worries are certainly understandable, the political leadership here, especially PM Ramos-Horta, has been

extremely deferential toward the F-FDTL and is unlikely to take any measures to restrict its movements. Ramos-Horta, who also holds the defense minister portfolio, vocally pushed for the F-FDTL's "normalization", insisting that as the defense force of a sovereign country they should have the same rights as foreign military troops on the ground. He recently ordered that F-FDTL be given primary responsibility for security at his residence and at the main government complex. He also said recently that F-FDTL commander Brig. Gen. Taur Matan Ruak should become President if Xanana Gusmao decides not to run, although there are indications that he may have said this as a way to put pressure on Gusmao to stay on for another term. According to JTF (Joint Task Force) sources, as a result of concerns about use of hand grenades in recent gang violence, the PM had agreed in principle to an external audit of F-FDTL's hand grenade holdings, but has now reneged and will allow only an F-FDTL internal audit.

¶5. (C) In the short term, the increasingly visible presence of armed F-FDTL elements around Dili presents the potential for more incidents involving the local population and internationals, and further clashes with newly reactivated PNTL, as well as the possibility of involvement in internal security issues, especially given the likelihood of political demonstrations in the coming months. With the strong presence of UNPOL and the JTF, it is likely that any such incidents can be managed, but the international security forces understandably see direct clashes with F-FDTL as a scenario to be avoided at all costs. In the longer term, F-FDTL will present a potential threat to stability and development of democratic institutions unless a number of unresolved issues are addressed. These include:

- the lack of an effectively functioning Ministry of Defense or other relevant institutions and resultant absence of real civilian control of the military;
- the current unbalanced composition of the force, now dominated by personnel from the eastern part of the country following the departure of the mostly western petitioners;
- a history of clashes with police culminating in the May 25, 2006 shooting attack on unarmed police under UN escort, killing

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eight and wounding numerous others;

- the as yet almost total lack of accountability for this or previous incidents involving F-FDTL;
- lack of control over F-FDTL weapons inventories;
- the lack of clear distinctions between active duty regular soldiers and other elements, including ex-Falantil who are not part of the present force but who apparently continue to reside at F-FDTL bases and may have access to weapons;
- lack of any defined mission.

¶6. (C) Taur Matan Ruak repeatedly stresses to us his commitment to rule of law and desire to avoid "banana republic" scenarios. Despite these increasing disciplinary issues, Ruak still appears to maintain sufficient control over F-FDTL troops to prevent a much larger scale problem. However, this dependence on a single individual to maintain control is worrying. He and foreign advisors continue to engage in the drawn out, long delayed "Force 2020" process that is designed to provide the blue print for the future F-FDTL and address some of the above issues. Ruak and other officers concede that F-FDTL has severe shortcomings in meeting the human resources requirements of a modern defense force. In the meantime, however, elements of the political leadership continue to call for F-FDTL to play a role in internal security, and in this time of crisis the country's leaders are focusing more than ever on glorifying the role of the armed resistance during the struggle. In this context, US policy should focus on:

- supporting the UN and DSRSG Tan in taking a tough stance in regards to the recent incidents;
- continuing to emphasize the necessity of removing the impunity under which F-FDTL have operated throughout their history, with a particular emphasis on the events of 2006;
- emphasize the importance of appropriate security sector reform with an eye towards a force with a clear mandate suitable

to East Timor's needs and capabilities.
GRAY